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AUTHOR Bradt, William D.
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ABSTRACT

The Little Falls City School District's K-12 gifted and talented program is organized on three sequential levels. The elementary grades program is part of the nationally replicated Talents Unlimited Program based on Bloom's Taxonomy, and is taught by the regular classroom teacher to all students in a participating classroom. Students participate in any subject area through previously constructed lesson plans consisting of intellectual exercises. The second level (discontinued at this time because of funding) for seventh and eighth grades is a pull-out program in which an instructor meets with identified gifted/talented students one to two hours per week. The program features simulation exercises, field trips, intellectual games, and discussions about proposed projects. An advisory committee determines guidelines for selecting students for this level and the third level (grades 9-12). Third level students undergo a series of simulation exercises, meetings with professionals in their areas of interest, and conferences with the director about available research data. A mentor is selected for each student, to act as a facilitator, resource person, and reinforcer. The student or group of students selects a worthwhile one to four year project. At this stage, independent study and individualized educational planning are emphasized. (CM)

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LITTLE FALLS CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT
LITTLE FALLS, NEW YORK 13365

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Development of a Gifted and Talented Program in a Small School

Position Paper - by Dr. William D. Bradt, Superintendent of Schools

The Little Falls City School District is in a city-rural community and is comprised of three schools--two elementary and one junior-senior high school--in the historical Mohawk Valley of New York State. Having once been a thriving metropolis of numerous factories and businesses, it has suffered the same decline in industry and population experienced by many similar communities in the northeastern United States. As a consequence, in order to provide a school curriculum that would be considered roughly equivalent to its more wealthy and fortunate counterparts in various sections of the state, it is imperative that every means at our disposal be used to locate funding for otherwise too expensive programs. It is within this context and recognized limitations that we have developed a plan for a K-12 gifted and talented program (g/t) for our students.

Our first consideration was one of practicality. It also was one of socio-economic, philosophical, and psychological ramifications. Differences of opinions as to a pull-out or an integrated classroom program were seriously considered with feelings running deep on either side. Elitism, teacher opposition and scheduling all presented problems and possible obstacles to the development of a g/t program.

Given these issues, it was decided that for our elementary grades, and those of St. Mary's Academy located in our community, a program designed to be taught by the regular classroom teacher to all the students in each participating classroom would be the most beneficial to the most students in a most cost-effective process.

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With the aid of our regional director for special programs, we were informed of and encouraged to apply for the nationally replicated Talents Unlimited program with headquarters at the time of our funding in Mobile, Alabama. The reasons for our decision to participate in this particular program were:

1. No pull-out of g/t students from the regular classroom is necessary.
2. The regular classroom teacher is the discussion leader enabling the teacher who knows the students best to be actively and directly involved in the process.
3. All the students participate equally in the process to offer optimum opportunity to all in the classroom, while still at an early age, to strive for excellence.
4. A natural environmental situation for hands-on constructive inservice workshop for the participating staff members.
5. The program provides a feeder plan to continually prepare students at a later stage for g/t programs offered at the secondary level.

The Talents Unlimited program is constructed around the higher levels of the thinking process as delineated in Bloom's Toxonomy. The students, through previously constructed lesson plans consisting of intellectual exercises, are active participants at any time during the day the teacher may choose and may be applied to any subject area. It is hoped that eventually through local funding there will be classes at every grade level K-6 participating in this program to allow for a continuous motivational plan to stimulate the thought processes of the student.

Funding for the two-year grant was provided by the State of New York. The cost of continuing the Talents Unlimited program after the completion of the two-year grant is minimal. Locally developed evaluative procedures are within the means of

any school faculty. What may result over the years if the program is successfully maintained is a decided improvement in the student's creativity and reasoning processes.

To continue the second level of the sequential offering of a g/t program, our Herkimer County Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) originally provided the means by which students in our seventh and eighth grades were given classes by a BOCES-funded instructor for the g/t student. It was a pull-out program, the instructor meeting with the identified g/t students one to two hours per week. Simulation exercises, trips to local points of interest to the students, intellectual games and discussions as to proposed individual projects were built into the students' schedules.

One of the initial stages of developing a g/t program is the implementation of the identification process. An advisory committee was organized which was composed of teachers, parents, administration and the BOCES g/t instructor for the explicit purpose of determining the guidelines under which students were to be selected. Many instruments of evaluation can be used including, but certainly not limited to, I.Q., grade point average, achievement tests and teacher-parent-peer nominations.

Unfortunately, as funding in New York State for programs such as the g/t continued to diminish, the local BOCES Regional Center was forced to discontinue the junior high school level program. This left a gap in our overall plan about which we are studying every possible way to fund this level of program either through grants or local monies.

The third level of our g/t program will be for eligible students attending 9-12. It is a modest beginning with minimal funding provided through the New York State

Title IV-C mini-grants (not to exceed $2,000 per grant). In our BOCES district, the size grant per project was set at a $1,000 maximum. None of the funding is to be allocated for equipment--only software and supplies. New York State estimates that in every school district the top two to five percent of the student body are potential g/t students. In our school district it is estimated that with our very modest financial base we may serve approximately one-third of this group.

The 9-12 program consists of three stages: one, an identification process much like the process used by the BOCES director to identify the junior high level students in his program. A committee of faculty, parents, administrator and the local program director (English teacher) will be formed to develop and expedite the process. Two, the selected students will undergo a series of simulation exercises, meetings with professionals in their areas of interest, and conferences with the director as to research data available. The final stage will be the selection of a mentor for each of the students to act as a facilitator, resource person and reinforcer for the student, as well as the student or group of students selecting a worthwhile project to complete by the end of the school year. A two-, three-, or four-year project is definitely a possibility dependent upon the level of difficulty. At this stage, independent study and individualized educational planning will be emphasized and encouraged. What funding is needed over and above that provided by the small Title IV-C mini-grant (which is, incidentally, competitive) will hopefully be provided by the local budget.

In our development of a three-level plan for the g/t student, it is strongly believed that we have a firm base upon which to build a long-lasting program. The

elementary grades will continually initiate the process to every student for the benefit of every student. The junior high level will begin the exposure process in a more selective setting for those students who qualify. Activities to stimulate their interest is one primary goal. Another goal is to achieve a balance between "someone special" and "elitism." At the senior high level the responsibilities become more definitive and all-encompassing. The maturing process will, in itself, be a major factor in the successful completion of their project.

Educational research into the reasons why students have rarely developed their ability to be creative and reason logically is just now beginning to be developed. Our interest in this area of concern at Little Falls is also one in which we could, in a practical sense, contribute by providing data for a possible research project. In addition, it has long been believed by us that whatever benefits derived from the knowledge gained in studying programs developed for the g/t student should in many respects be incorporated into programs for the average student.

Accountability is the present watchword for any existing or new program in our schools today. Cost-effectiveness is always a prime factor when any school district is forced to apply at least some of the principles of a zero-based budget. Knowing these factors are the challengers to the survival of our g/t program, we are ever mindful of the effort we must put forth to achieve our goals and objectives.

(5/4/81)